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ABSTRACT

The author explains that there does not exist one single method of teaching reading since there are different teaching styles and preferences of individual teachers; varied backgrounds, experiences, and abilities among children; and different school administration considerations. Five approaches for teaching reading are described. (1) The developmental guided basal approach uses a systematized series of basal books, workbooks, tests, and reading aids. Different basal series may stress different methods: sight word method, intensive phonics program, balanced phonics, or the linguistics approach. (2) The highly individualized language experience approach emphasizes the child's own language and experience while reading is taught as one part of the total communication process. (3) Individualized reading programs encourage children to read widely according to their own interests and levels. (4) Independent learning activities expose children to programed instruction, often mechanized, to learn reading independently at their own pace, and (5) The initial teaching alphabet provides 44 symbols to represent English sounds. It is recommended that parents understand the reading programs in their child's school so that they can cooperate with the teachers to achieve the goal of competent readers. This brochure is one of a series commissioned by the National Reading Center to help inform all citizens about reading issues and to promote functional literacy. (AW)

Methods

WHY DO TEACHERS HAVE DIFFERENT WAYS OF TEACHING READING?

By J. Jaap Tuinman
(Indiana University)

Why are there so many methods and so many materials that a teacher can employ to teach reading? Why don't they find the *best* method to teach all children to read and stick with that? This brochure has been created to help explain the reasons there does not exist one standardized method of teaching reading, and to describe the various methods that do exist.

THE REASONS

Over fifty years of research and countless studies have failed to show that one approach to teaching reading is consistently better than any other for use with all children. Further, there is no way to determine which way of teaching reading would be the best in a given situation, with a particular teacher and a particular group of children. The effectiveness of *any* approach or method depends directly upon the skill of the teacher using it with the children in her own classroom. It is her ability to tailor methods and materials to the needs of each child that counts.

The variations in the way reading is taught may be differences in the approach used or materials used. Two teachers may be using different reading materials and yet be using the same basic approach; others may be using the same series of books, but doing very different things with them. When a child switches to a new school which uses basically the same approach to teaching reading as his previous one, he will probably have little difficulty even if he has to adjust to a new reader series, than if he had to switch to an entire new approach as well.

Why do individual teachers or whole school districts choose to use one approach to the teaching of reading rather than another? Teachers *do* have individual teaching styles and preferences; children have varied backgrounds and experiences, different levels of language skill and concept development. Consequently, they learn differently. Schools provide varied amounts and kinds of materials from which to learn; and some communities are more open to experimentation and innovation in their schools than others. In school systems where individual teachers or teacher committees decide which approach and materials will be used, decisions may be reached as a result of previous success with certain materials, convictions based on professional reading literature or ideas gained through participation in workshops. Sometimes administrators make the decisions in response to parental wishes, budgetary considerations or because they rely on the quality of one set of materials over another.

THE FLEXIBILITY

However the decisions are arrived at, whatever approaches, methods or materials are used, it is important to remember that the teaching of reading can be successful with any one of the approaches described below, or a combination of them. No method has to be used exclusively, and frequently a blending by an imaginative teacher who is sensitive to the needs of a particular child will produce the best results. Some teachers are spontaneous and are able to weave unexpected happenings and interests into their lesson plan for the day. Others stick closely to the manuals and carefully planned development. Reason dictates those of teachers, children, parents, and administrators usually affect the success of [illegible] programs.

[illegible] of the different ways of teaching reading which have been accepted and used by many school systems over a long period of time, others have appeared more

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THE FLEXIBILITY

However the decisions are made, the advantage of whatever approaches, methods or materials are used is flexibility. [illegible] teaching [illegible] one of the [illegible] combination [illegible] used [illegible] are [illegible] needs [illegible] and are [illegible] and [illegible] or [illegible] and [illegible] and [illegible] packed [illegible]

recently and are still frankly experimental. It should be noted that none guarantee success.

THE BASAL APPROACH

Still popular in many schools are the approaches that use a series of basal readers through the elementary grades. The materials of each series are carefully systematized, utilizing a series of books, workbooks, tests and reading aids for each grade or reading level. These are carefully regulated methods. Vocabulary is controlled, and lesson plans and suggestions for supplemental activities are explained in the teachers' manual. Different basal series may utilize different approaches to teaching reading. Some feature a "sight" or whole word approach to reading—others feature an intensive phonics program. Still others use the balanced or gradual phonics approach, while a fourth type emphasizes sound-symbol relationships in a so-called linguistic approach.

In the type of basal readers that focus on learning words by sight, children are [illegible] a large number of words [illegible] repetition is used, and [illegible] and decoding words are [illegible] child has a large bank of [illegible] for making generaliza-

[illegible] phonics [illegible] learns to [illegible] sound of [illegible] which these [illegible] makes [illegible] isolation [illegible] to [illegible] meaning [illegible] sound [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

by letter, and more emphasis on generalizing from known words to new words.

LINGUISTICS

The linguistic approach encourages the recognition of pattern words such as can, fan, dan, or bat, fat, cat. Gradually, small but important differences, as between mat and met, are introduced. Once patterns of words and sentences are recognized, meaning follows.

TOTAL COMMUNICATION

In contrast to the developmental, guided approach of the basal readers, there are the language experience approaches which need not rely on any set of specifically prepared readers. Here, emphasis is on the child's own language and experience. Though some professionally prepared readers are now on the market, frequently the children create their own reading material as they tell stories or dictate experiences and thoughts to teachers and classmates for themselves and others to read. In this approach, reading is taught as one part of the total communications process of speaking, listening, reading and writing. This highly individualized approach requires a creative, confident teacher—one who is comfortable with the unexpected. Skills are introduced incidentally, rather than formally, as the need arises. Meaning is all important.

ANOTHER VARIATION

Individualized reading, another variation, encourages children to read widely, using any textbook or literary books they wish. The reading levels are along the lines of their own interests. Skills are taught during individual teacher conferences with each child as they encounter difficulties, and during pupil sharing of comments about books they are reading.

LEARNING INDEPENDENTLY

As in the individualized reading approach, children exposed to programmed instruction, often mechanized, can proceed to learn to read independently and at their own pace. Material is introduced in small steps and in careful sequence. The child teaches himself and can correct his mistakes as he goes along. More and more school systems are now experimenting with computer and other machine assisted approaches. All of these allow the child to pace his own learning quite independently, while the teacher is freed to give greater help to those who are having difficulty or who need more personal instruction.

44 SYMBOLS

A recent popular approach to beginning reading is call i/t/a which stands for "initial teaching alphabet." Originally developed in England, i/t/a provides a system of 44 symbols for the sounds represented by the 26 letters of our alphabet. The child first learns to read using this alphabet and after he has learned basic reading skills, makes the transition to standard English spelling.

KEEPING INFORMED

These are the approaches, then, that are most commonly being used by teachers in the public schools. By informing themselves about the reading program at their schools, parents can find ways to help teachers and children to achieve the ultimate goal: development of competent young readers through whatever kind or combination of methods or materials being used.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The resources on ERIC/CRIER were used in the preparation of this paper.

This publication was one of a series developed by the National Reading Center to help parents and others interested in reading learn about its problems, practices, and research findings.

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